

Spears Architects specializes in diversity

By Paul Weideman

Architecture is art, and Beverley Spears believes architects should sign their buildings just like painters and sculptors sign their work.

If this had been the convention during the past two decades, Spears' name would be all over the place.

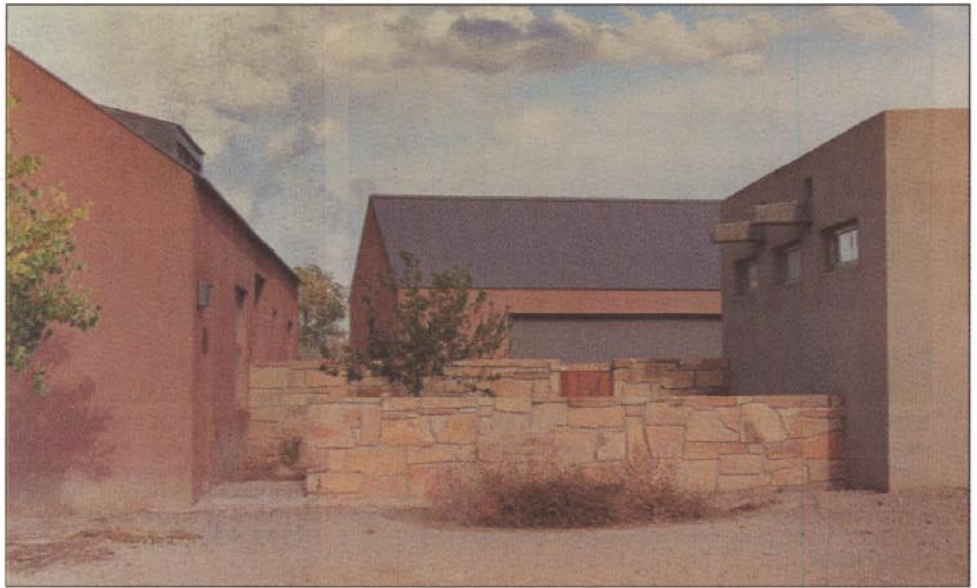
Spears Architects AIA specializes in educational facilities, urban design, landscape architecture, historic preservation and residential design. The firm's project list includes 24 construction projects for area school districts and for government and institutional clients including the National Park Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, St. John's College and the Museum of New Mexico.

Spears has worked for the city of Santa Fe on updating its General Plan, creating urban-design standards and revising commercial and industrial design standards.

The company has won numerous awards from the American Institute of Architects (AIA), most recently the 2000 "New Mexico Architects' Medal" presented by AIA New Mexico.

Beverley Spears was educated at Tulane University, New Orleans; and University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; but she loves the vernacular architectural of Northern New Mexico.

"I like doing contemporary buildings but I want them to be warm and comfortable and welcoming," she said. "I think the tradition of architecture in this area is very rich and lends itself to sunlight and rich surfaces. There's a great vocabulary of materials here and an interesting history of forms in terms of the ground plane, plus a variety of indoor and out-



Photos Courtesy of Spears Architects AIA

The house, garage and studio of the Morin house, Galisteo

door spaces that include the courtyard, zaguan, plaza and the narrow streets. It's a tremendous amount to draw from."

In 1983, two years after starting her firm, Spears received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to study the pitched-roof houses of rural New Mexico. One result of that work is a gem of a reference book, *American Adobes: Rural Houses of Northern New Mexico* (Ancient City Press, 1986).

"I learned some things by doing the book, things about proportions and the ways dormers were done," she said. "I'm less interested in pitched roofs now than I was 10 years ago just because it's been done a lot since then. And the pitched roof is more aggressive in the landscape - I'm also a landscape architect and I really care about how buildings stand out on the land."

The company's goals in design are comfort, respect for surroundings, durability, low energy use and alternatives to wood-frame construction: adobe, pumice, straw-bale and Rastra.

Valdez Builders used Rastra in the Spears-designed Morin house in Galisteo completed in May 2000. The 3,268 square feet of heated space is divided into a composition of four buildings - main house, separate master bedroom, studio and garage, two buildings with flat roofs and two pitched with simple gables - on five acres of open grassland. The project includes three small patios delineated by stone walls linking the buildings.

Spears, who chairs the New Mexico Board of Examiners for Architects, is against a current drive to unify architectural licensing rather than having it under the domain of the states.

"My opinion is that would go against regional architecture with its cultural and

climatological demands," she said. "There are special issues in the kinds of buildings required in Florida with its humidity and Alaska with the permafrost and in New Mexico but that's not a popular idea now with the trend toward globalization."

Recent and ongoing projects for Spears include the following:

- Santa Fe Preparatory School: a new commons building that includes a dining room and kitchen; a new student lounge and faculty lounge and a board/seminar room; gymnasium renovation. Completed in October 2001.
- St. John's United Methodist Church: major addition. Broke ground earlier this winter.
- Lannan Foundation: Remodel of a historic building, adjacent to the Foundation office at 309 Read Street, as a meeting room, plus a garden.
- Open Hands: New building, nearly 15,000 square feet, in Rodeo Business Park, features rooms and a large, enclosed garden tailored to the organization's adult day-care program. Completed last spring.

"We preserved as many piñon trees as possible on this site and we relocated the ones we disturbed," Spears said. "I think this is a model for the business park because."

- An adobe house in Santa Fe County. Spears is using unamended adobe bricks and natural mud plasters, and exposed beams of Parallam, a new parallel-strand lumber product. A part of the north wall is insulated but the rest of the house will be solid adobe with an 18-inch roof overhang to protect exterior plaster from rainfall.

"We will not do houses larger than 5,000 square feet," Spears said. "It's kind of an arbitrary cutoff but very large houses use too much building materials and require a lot of energy for maintenance, and they tend to be eyesores on the landscape."



A Spears-designed interior space at Santa Fe Preparatory School